



Towards

Strong Sustainable Consumption Governance

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Making an Impact – Collective Actions Towards Sustainable Consumption and Production

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(Mis-) Understandings of Sustainable Consumption

What to make sustainable

If people talk about Sustainable Consumption what do they understand
“consumption” stands for?

- Household consumption (e.g. consumption habits, possession of single items)
- Consumption in economic terms (private consumption + public consumption)
- Resource consumption (business and industries also consume)

Sustainable Consumption has to reflect resource consumption

if not

→ those seen as the consumers might be blamed as those with the main responsibility → discussions might get lost in marginal's instead of relevant impacts

(Mis-) Understandings of Sustainable Consumption

Why making consumption sustainable?

The major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment is the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production, ...

which is a matter of grave concern, aggravating poverty and imbalance:

(Agenda 21)

“the use of services and related products which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimising the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life-cycle so as not to jeopardise the needs of future generations.”

(Oslo Symposium 1994)

Sustainable Consumption has an environment and a development aspect

→ The well-being of people matters!

...and their (resource) consumption is an aspect in it

Debunking Weak Sustainable Consumption

Shortcomings of recent Weak Sustainable Consumption policies:

- Concentration on environmental aspects and their technological solution
- Search for solutions focusing on goods and services in form of commodities
- Economic growth as the major indicator for a 'better life'

This neglects that:

- The dimension and urgency of the problem
- Rebound and growth effects compensate technological efficiency gains
- Well-being is correlated with material consumption up to a specific level only
- Well-being also depends on social aspects

Debunking Weak Sustainable Consumption

The $I=P*A*T$ formula

Impact on the environment = Population x Affluence x Technology

What we know:

Impact↓ = Population↑

What Weak Sustainable

Consumption promotes:

Affluence↑

What we don't know:

Technology (?)

The hope of the proponents of weak sustainable consumption solely rests on the optimistic view about (upcoming) technological solutions

Debunking Weak Sustainable Consumption

| | | Real state of the world | |
|----------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| | | Technology can solve the problems | Technology can't solve the problems |
| Current Policy | Weak Sustainable Consumption policy | High | Desaster |
| | Strong Sustainable Consumption policy | Moderate | Tolerable |

Source: adopted from Costanza (1991)

Towards Strong Sustainable Consumption Governance

What makes the difference of Strong Sustainable Consumption?

- It questions affluence and its underlying growth paradigm ($I \downarrow = P \uparrow \times A \downarrow \times T?$)
- It demands reallocation of resources to those with the highest marginal utility rate, the poor
- It supports well-being decoupled from market activities and economic growth rates



Towards Strong Sustainable Consumption Governance

Governance strategies for Strong Sustainable Consumption

- Appreciate the potential of social innovation
- Sharpen NGO strategies
- Strengthen responsibility of governments

- Carrot and stick to stimulate the societal debate

Stick: create a sense of urgency → there is no alternative

Carrot: well-being depends on more than growth, de-growth if organised is not the disaster economists like to suggest